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HUMAN FACTORS THAT DERAIL EXTENSION SERVICES DELIVERY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

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Abstract

The paper examines human factors derailing extension services delivery in developing countries. Poor management of rewards and incentives; quality of work life; poor assessment system; limited quality of human resource; inadequate extension support training materials; inconsistencies of government programmes; inadequate staff training and poor extension programme evaluation were viewed as major constraints. Considering the role of extension to agricultural development, the paper recommends that efforts should be made by the various stakeholders in agricultural extension services to improve the capability of human resources involved in extension services and highlights the need for government agricultural programmes to be consistent to enable the beneficiaries of such programmes derive the benefits that will boost productivity in agriculture.

Keywords: Human Factors, Extension Services Delivery, Developing Countries

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Introduction

Agricultural extension services delivery play an important role in agricultural development and improves the standard of living of rural dwellers. Extension education serves the needs of educating farmers on ways of improving their farm production and life style. They are educated on how to purposefully mobilize their resources, rationally allocate them and effectively utilize them to achieve their preselected goals. Vijayaragavan and Singh (1999) observed that extension organizations in developing countries face the major problems of professional incompetence and inadequate motivation among their employees.

Rao and Pareek (2004) stressed that many of the agricultural extension departments of the developing countries do not have a well-defined system of human resource management. This affects the entire extension organization and subsequently weakens the effectiveness of extension services delivery. They further noted that, there is need for the increasing importance in the area of human resource management in extension organizations to remove the respective impediments among their employees for effective job performance.

The paper therefore reviews human factors derailing extension services delivery in developing countries. It relied heavily on literature and personal observations.

Human factors derailing extension services delivery in developing countries

There are major human factors which derail effective extension services delivery. These factors include:

Poor management of rewards and incentives

This is one of the aspects of human resource management which needs special attention in extension organizations. It entails the development of reward systems which attract, retain and motivate extension personnel as well as provide training and promotional opportunities. Extension organizations in Asian and African countries have poor reward system (Vijayaragavan, 2000; Swanson *et al.*, 1998). Similar studies conducted by Wiggins (1999) disclosed that the extension agents are not only poorly paid but are paid late after reminders of visits to the headquarters about their payment. The public extension services are run by government thus operating under rules and regulations of public administration. The rules do not have provisions for rewarding superior performance or for wage payment system based on merit.

Under such administrative set up, promotion criteria are based on seniority and length of service rather than merit. Vijayaragavan and Singh (1999) in their studies viewed that, among many of the government departments particularly, the agricultural departments

(including extension service department); there are low public esteem and poor payment structure. A clear job description, performance standards, and performance appraisal will help in evaluating extension work and rewarding people for meritorious service. For example, extension workers on the basis of their performance can be sent for higher education. Non-monetary rewards such as recognizing the good ideas of field workers or awarding honorable titles will also help in improving performance. Extension personal may also be encouraged to form professional societies to develop and communicate high standards, as well as to recognize superior performance. Thus the bureaucratic structure and administration of the extension services is a basic hindrance to designing a better reward system for extension staff. This hinders effective extension delivery system.

Unimproved quality of work life

Human resource development emphasized individual development through training and proper supervision. However, with the increasing complexity of extension organizations and the society, it is realized that not only training and proper supervision play important roles in extension development, but there is also need for improving the quality of work life through making the extension job more satisfying by involving the employees in work decision making process (Pareek, 2003). Studies by Thamtani and Singh (2000; 2002) showed that the work environment of the extension organizations in developing countries is poor and needs improvement to enhance effective extension delivery and agricultural development.

Poor reward and assessment systems

The reward of extension staff in case of outstanding performance or hard work and payment of other necessary allowances is far reached in developing countries (Warren, 2003). The assessment of agricultural extension workers favors inputs given out for training farmers rather than the output of extension work by the extension agents. Qualitative assessment and effective supervision is not carried out by extension administrators. Extension workers therefore, are not stimulated to achieve quality outputs or hardly become innovative, creative and take initiative towards extension services delivery. This limits extension services delivery and agricultural development.

Poor quality of human resource

At most levels of agricultural extension, limited human resource is always a constraint to the proper functioning of extension system. Zinnah *et al.* (1999) stressed that one of the major problems

impeding the effectiveness of agricultural extension services in Asia and Africa is the low level of trained extension staff. FAO (1996) stated that, shortage of trained extension staff makes it impossible for the teeming population of farmers in rural areas to be effectively reached with the expected information on improved farming methods. A ration of one extension agent to eight hundred farmers (1: 800) is practical at the moment in the developing countries.

Agricultural extensionists constitute the least trained group of staff in developing nations' agricultural organizations. It is viewed that their initial formal training is usually inadequate in most cases, where in-service training is provided, it is often ad-hoc in nature and not responsive to the changing situation of extension tasks.

Inadequate extension support training materials

Most extension organizations in developing countries suffer from relevant and practical extension training materials to support field activities of their extension workers. Many extension workers rely primarily on their inter-personal communication skills which limit their scope of coverage (Adhikaraya, 1996). Inability to provide enough, specifically designed and relevant extension training support materials like communication gadgets such as mobile phones, automatic video camera, and public address system, video machines, tape recorder etc., limit the scope of extension work.

Inadequate training materials increase the work load of extension staff and reduce the quality and area of coverage of their extension messages. Experience has shown that extension worker's motivation, enthusiasm, confidence and credibility reduce when training materials are not made available to them. Poor provision of the necessary training materials as noted above in developing countries result to low quality extension services delivery.

Inconsistency of government programmes

According to Zinnah *et al.* (1999), there is low consistency within and outside the programmes of various public extension services especially those related to agricultural and community development. Strategies are not synchronized and there is often conflict, the extension workers are forced to use top-down approach despite the diversity and complexity of conditions and problems in rural areas.

The dominance of mechanistic top-down approach which entails "wait for order from the highest echelon" as the case in agricultural extension makes the extension services delivery

weak and decrease the zeal in extension workers. This results to weak extension services delivery by extension workers to farmers.

Inadequate training and development

The training of extension personnel contributes directly to the development of human resource within extension organizations. Training programmes need to be directed towards maintaining and improving job performance and develop skills further (Stoner and Freeman, 2004). Training has to start with identification of training needs through job analysis, performance appraisal and organizational analysis. Once the training needs of extension personal have been identified, the next step is to organize training programmes. Methods such as games, role playing, simulation exercises, and case can be used in extension organizations to create learning situations based on experience (Lynton and Pareek, 1990). Extension agents need training not only in the technological aspects of introduced innovations but also in human relations, problem solving and basic aspects of management to effectively interact with farmers.

In most cases, the desired training of the extension agents is weak especially the practical aspects even when made available in developing countries. This slows down the pace of extension services delivery.

Poor extension programme evaluation

Inadequate extension programme evaluation impedes extension services delivery. Stufflebeam *et al.* (1974); Warren (2003) and Ajayi (1995) in their separate studies emphasized that, very few extension agents attach importance to project evaluation. Most of the extension workers prefer administrative duties and largely forget about evaluating the extension programmes that are carried out in their areas of operation for further action. Hence evaluation is a driving force that keeps a constant touch/ check on every aspect of extension organization, to ensure maximum efficiency, its programmes and activities if not taken seriously will contribute to failure of extension services delivery.

Conclusion

Human resource planning forecasts the future personnel, their training needs, financial requirements and managerial implications in extension organizations. The rapid changes in technological needs of farmers, market situations and competitive environment has made planning for human resource a challenging task for extension organizations.

Priority actions should always be taken by the developing countries to improve their agricultural sector and economy in general. It is hoped that,

the governments of developing countries should always examine properly human factors with a view to remove all the bottlenecks in their agricultural extension services to pave way for agricultural development. They should not depend entirely on expatriates and foreign donor agencies to correct weaknesses in their own domestic policies. This could be achieved through the assessment of future needs of human resource strength based on the analysis of present and future human resource requirement policies and growth trends of the developing countries.

Recommendations

1. Special attention should be given to the development of specific reward system for extension workers by both public and private extension organizations. This will attract, retain and motivate extension personnel.
2. Extension personnel should be involved at all levels of programme/ project decision of extension agencies (both public and private) to carry all staff along. This will enhance the employee's working performance.
3. Extension personnel under training should be well trained to achieve maximum job efficiency. The training of quality extension personnel based on field situations in large number will narrow the gap between extension agents-farmers contact ratio, which is currently 1: 800.
4. Government programmes related to agricultural and community development should be consistent to avoid subsequent disruption in extension delivery efforts.
5. The extension agencies (public and private) should concentrate on both input and output assessment of extension personnel rather than concentrating only on assessment of inputs invested.
6. Reward of superior performance and prompt payment of salaries and other allowances to extension workers should be encouraged.
7. Extension support and training materials should be provided at all times for use by extension agents to enhance their performance.
8. The dominance of mechanistic top-down approach of government towards extension services delivery efforts should be discouraged.
9. Constant evaluation of all extension programmes should be given priority by all extension workers to ascertain the success of programmes introduced.

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